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ABSTRACT

This document reports on the 1991-92 Teacher Recognition Program honoring exceptional teachers from rural and small schools in the New England states, New York, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The program was intended to enrich the quality of education in the Northeast United States and its Caribbean jurisdictions by sharing information about outstanding teaching practices and those who implement them. The program sought nominations for teachers who incorporated multilevel grouping strategies into their classrooms, preschool through grade 5. Multilevel grouping or ungraded classrooms promotes learning by placing students in small groups with flexible age boundaries that provide opportunities for children to interact with other children of different backgrounds, personalities, abilities, and interests. Evaluation of students' progress is continuous and takes into consideration each child's past individual performance. Teacher nominations came from central office and building-level administrators, other teachers, and members of educational organizations. This volume offers a brief profile of each of the nine honored teachers and excerpts from their submitted portfolios that discuss philosophy, describe programs and sample class activities, share evidence of impact, and briefly summarize their approaches. Three finalists are also acknowledged for their valuable teaching practices. (LP)

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Outstanding Teaching Practices Series, Volume 4

MULTILEVEL GROUPING, Grades Preschool-5
Small and Rural Schools

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A project of the Rural, Small Schools Network

The Regional Laboratory
for Educational Improvement of the Northeast & Islands

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Outstanding Teaching Practices Series, Volume 4

MULTILEVEL GROUPING, Grades Preschool-5 Small and Rural Schools

1991-1992 Laboratory Fellows
Teacher Recognition Program
A Project of the Rural, Small Schools Network

The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands

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In these difficult times, it is easy to get discouraged about the future for our children. Spending any amount of time in Mary Lou's class is a good reminder of what education at its best can be."

(nominator, Maura S. Johnson)

"Adele quietly goes about making a difference in the lives of her students. She doesn't look for fanfare or applause, she simply creates the best environment she can for her students."

(nominator, E. Sue Tay)

Each year The Regional Laboratory's Teacher Recognition Program honors teachers from rural and small schools who extend the boundaries of success in a selected area. This year, the program sought exceptional teachers who incorporate multilevel grouping strategies into their classrooms, preschool through grade five. In addition to the title of 1991-1992 Laboratory Fellow, each honoree receives a $500 honorarium.

Nominations for this year's Teacher Recognition Program came from central office and building level administrators, other teachers, and members of educational organizations. Nominees then submitted to the Selection Committee portfolios of achievement that speak of their educational background, philosophy, goals, and programs. Selections were made based on the contents of these portfolios. This volume of the Outstanding Teaching Practices Series offers a short profile of each Fellow as well as excerpts from each Fellow's portfolio. This volume also includes the list of 1991-1992 Finalists -- three teachers whose valuable practices also deserve acknowledgement.

The Teacher Recognition Program began in 1988 as a program to honor teachers in small and rural schools and is conducted through The Regional Laboratory's Rural, Small Schools Network.

INTRODUCTION

The five educators nominated for this recognition program have done a superb job of creating an environment for young learners that is reflective of current knowledge about learning, learners, and subject matter. They have been involved in developing a belief system about young learners, which in turn has been the basis for creating a structure that supports this belief system. The staff realize that they don't have all the answers in regard to early childhood education, and because of that they have made reflection on practice an integral part of their ongoing evaluative process of our primary programs.

Gary MacDonald
Principal
New Suncook School, Lovell, Maine

In Multilevel Grouping, Grades Preschool - 5, nine teachers from rural and small schools throughout the Northeast share ideas and strategies that have worked for them in creating multilevel groups within their classes. Many already actively disseminate their innovative practices with colleagues and college students. It is their hope that you, the reader, will also benefit from their work and ideas.

Appalachia Educational Laboratory recently defined the essential ingredients of ungraded programs: "Since ungraded classrooms are child-centered, they will not all look alike. But they can be expected to have at least six essential ingredients in common":

- **Goals of schooling**. Each child is thought of as a whole person who needs help to grow socially, emotionally, physically, aesthetically, and intellectually;
- **Curriculum** is structured on learning to learn. It is integrated, age appropriate, and individual appropriate;
- **Teaching**. Teachers prepare the environment, work with each other to plan the curriculum, and put kids in groups so they can learn from each other;
- **Materials**. Multiage classrooms have a wide variety of materials for a wide range of interests, ages, learning styles, and reading abilities as well as mathematics manipulatives and technology based writing;
- **Assessment**. Children's progress is measured in terms of each child's past individual performance. Assessment is continuous and comprehensive, taking into consideration all aspects of growth;

- **Grouping patterns**. Children work in small groups with flexible age boundaries. These groups provide opportunities for children to have frequent contact with other children of different personalities, backgrounds, abilities, and interests, as well as different ages.*

As you read, also consider that these teachers are risk-takers, innovators, and deep believers that all children can learn. Note that for variations on the above common themes in their programs, these educators offer their approaches as fodder for discussion and as points of departure for reflecting on the needs of our children, schools, and society in the 21st century.

Their addresses and phone numbers are listed in the acknowledgement that they may continue the discussion. We hope that you will contact them, and that through their pioneering work, classrooms in which all students "learn more, learn better, learn faster, and enjoy the process" (Sheryl Peterson, 1990-1991 Laboratory Fellow) become a regular part of all our schools.

---

*Appalachia Educational Laboratory. "Ungraded Classrooms — Fail-Safe Schools?" Policy Briefs, 1991.

Front row (left to right): **Lauren Potter, Linda Deschenes**
Back row (left to right): **Karen Johnson, Susan Steller, Rhonda Poliquin**

New Suncook School
Route 5
Lovell, Maine 04051
(207) 925-2735

Nominator: Gary McDonald
Principal

Superintendent: Rufus Ansley
SAD #72
Fryeburg, ME 04037

School enrollment: K-6, 235

District enrollment: K-8, 892

ABOUT THE TEACHERS . . .

Linda Deschenes *has been teaching primary-aged children for over thirteen years, five of those years in New Suncook's multiage setting. She has been involved with the Southern Maine Partnership, gaining insight into meeting children's needs. She has presented at several math workshops, focusing on hands-on learning.*

Karen Johnson *has worked for over eleven years in both primary and intermediate classrooms. She has worked in Suncook's multiage classrooms as part of this five member team. Ms. Johnson's graduate work in instructional leadership focused on the restructuring of education in the classroom, school, and community. She has worked with a committee to develop and implement the writing process and holistic assessment for the district. Her most recent curriculum work focused on the development of a reading curriculum K-12 that reflects current knowledge and practice.*

Rhonda Poliquin *has worked with children with special needs in SAD #72 for over nine years. Most recently, she has worked to fully integrate children with moderate disabilities into the multiage primary program. Ms. Poliquin is involved with both staff development and curriculum development committee work. Along with two other colleagues, Ms. Poliquin has taught an in-district course on mainstreaming special needs children into "regular" classes. She has also found that her involvement in the Southern Maine Partnership greatly influences her work in restructuring to meet the needs of all children.*

Lauren Potter *has been a facilitator in early childhood education for over sixteen years. She has taught preschool, kindergarten, and first grade. Most recently, she has been involved with the restructuring of the primary grades at the New Suncook School into a developmentally appropriate multiage program. She has her Master's degree in instructional leadership from the University of Southern Maine and has worked on the development of an early childhood graduate program and the creation of a developmentally appropriate screening process for entering kindergarten children. She has also presented workshops on whole language, multiage classrooms, parenting, and choice-making in a child's school experience.*

Susan Stellar *has worked in early childhood education for over eight years both in regular and multiage settings. Before joining the New Suncook primary grade team, Ms. Stellar was part of the Cooperative Preschool Program in Conway, New Hampshire. Ms. Stellar has been involved with the Southern Maine Partnership for over four years. She worked with Ms. Potter on creating a developmentally appropriate kindergarten screening process for the district.*

PHILOSOPHY

As educational facilitators we feel a commitment to provide our students with an enriching and meaningful environment that enables them to explore new experiences and expand their understanding of their world. To adapt this learning environment to meet the individual developmental needs of each and every student, we strive to challenge each at his or her appropriate level and to provide each child with the tools necessary to enable him or her to explore individual curiosities about the world. We are also committed to help children begin to understand their roles and responsibilities in keeping our world healthy and safe.

Our beliefs about young children and how they learn include: children operate on variable biological and psychological time and not on uniform physical time; each child is unique with his or her own individual pattern of growth, individual personality, learning style, and family background; all aspects of children's development are integrated -- physical, social

emotional, cognitive, and aesthetic; primary-aged children learn best through active participation with their learning environment; opportunities to make choices help children to gain independence in thinking, decision making, and problem solving; and children's learning is enhanced by peer modeling as well as adult modeling.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

This multiage, multiability K-2 program, taught by five teachers includes moderately handicapped children who are fully mainstreamed into the program. This primary program enables children to grow and develop at their own pace without leaving their peer group or familiar school setting.

In 1989, in an effort to better accommodate the developmental needs of young children, Lauren Potter and Linda Deschenes combined and team-taught their respective kindergarten and first grade classes. Rhonda Poliquin worked with special education students in the program. This initial multiage program was expanded in the fall of 1990 to include the second grade level and all primary composite resource room special needs students. Susan Potter and Karen Johnson joined the team. In 1991, the program consisted of four multiaged K-2 classes and a "graded" second grade. The teachers plan together, when appropriate, in order to make the best use of all available resources.

The curriculum is integrated and encompasses a wide range of developmental levels. Children may spend three to four years in the program depending on their development. The classrooms contain learning centers centered around science, social studies, writing, math, and other areas. The children have many opportunities to make choices about their learning activities. Children work with manipulatives and games using "Math Their Way" materials. They graph and estimate on a daily basis. Some groups use story boards and tiny props to create their own story problems. The "Investigations" block on children's schedules allows them to work with materials, perform experiments, predict outcomes, and work in groups around science, math, and social studies concepts.

Parent communication and involvement is welcomed and encouraged through classroom volunteers, conferences, and the "Of Primary Importance" newsletter. Each child also has a "Magic Moments" journal in which the teacher will record for parents exciting hands-on learning experiences that the child may have encountered. Before returning the journal to school, parents are asked to record a proud moment from home. Information about activities at home may be used in planning for that individual child. Report cards are narrative, based on the portfolios discussed below.

SAMPLE CLASS ACTIVITY

Learning centers have a planned topic or content focus (for example, the weather, water, ships and boats, flowers, space, poetry . . .) around which the children can choose from a number of activities. A computer is available to all children during the center time. Shared

reading involves pairs or small groups of children reading and working with trade- and teacher-prepared written works on a range of ability levels and a variety of genres around particular themes and topics. Some may be working in small groups with a teacher. Writing activities flow from children's daily experiences both at school and at home.

Example: The children have entered the world of geology. They have traveled around the world as they named the continents. They mapped the world through stenciling, painting, and puzzles. They explored what the ground is made of, made mud printings, crushed rocks to make their own sand, and worked with clay. One group of children explored the surface of the earth. They located continents in relation to the prime meridian and the equator. They put their knowledge together in cooperative groups by making paper mache globes. Other cooperative learning groups built a model of the earth from the inside out. The solid layers were made of a new kind of dough from baking soda and cornstarch. The liquid layers were colored water and wet clay. We peeled an onion layer by layer to find the core.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT/ASSESSMENT

On a daily basis, observations are recorded informally on color-coded index cards as teachers work with children and as they observe individual choices and activities at learning centers. On a monthly basis the children's work is saved as work samples in individual portfolios. In math, the observations and assessments are made using "Math Their Way" materials. In reading, the children conference with the teacher. The students also self-evaluate: they review their work for the previous week, make a general statement about their effort for the week, and make a record of the activities they found most challenging, would like to engage in again, haven't been offered and would like to try, or ones that they enjoyed the least. Quarterly anecdotal reports are sent to parents. Students and teachers conference about reading and writing progress. They set goals for the next quarter and select pieces of writing for their portfolios. Each fall, winter, and spring, the children have an audiotaped reading conference and a review of their portfolios.

The student portfolios consist of the note cards, writing samples, tape recordings, self-evaluations, and samples from personal journals of students. The teachers hope that this portfolio will show the child's growth socially, emotionally, and intellectually over the course of the year. These portfolios are shared with parents during end of year conferences during which decisions are made concerning future planning for the child. To date, students who have completed the primary program at New Suncook School have been able to work successfully in the intermediate program. A comprehensive, long range program evaluation study is currently under way.

SUMMARY

Our assumptions relate to young children and how they learn. An imperative part of determining how our practices match our assumptions is to show the learning outcomes. We have developed several ways of recording student academic progress. Data from this information is analyzed for significant trends. It is hoped that connections will begin to emerge that link our assumptions to our practice and to what children are actually learning.

DENNIS BATHORY KITSZ

Teacher, Music and Performing Arts
Roxbury Village School
Roxbury, Vermont 05669
(802) 485-7768

Nominator: Peter M. Evans
Principal

Superintendent: Ronald Paquette
Washington South SU
Northfield, VT 05663

School enrollment: K-6, 71

District enrollment: K-12, 984

For over twenty-five years Dennis Kitsz has been a prolific composer, author, technologist, cross-media artist, and teacher. As a composer he has written over 400 works, received grants and commissions, and been given over 100 premiers. As an author, he has published more than 300 articles and four books in fields as diverse as computer technology and science fiction. He was among the ten most recognized technological authors worldwide in 1982. He founded and led a computer peripheral manufacturing company, designed digital and analog hardware, and published a technical journal. A photographer, dancer, choreographer, and director, he has been active in all aspects of the media and performing arts.

As a teacher, Mr. Kitsz has taught college-level classes in computer science, music history, and composition. He has taught in an alternative urban school, consulted for several regional vocational centers, led seminars at artist/teacher institutes, and taught for six years in Roxbury Village Schools. Mr. Kitsz has also served as a member of his local school board.

PHILOSOPHY

Because of my unusual background, I bring a rather different philosophy to teaching elementary students. It consists of four elements: preparation (rather than performance); interactive participation; broad cultural and multicultural literacy; and critical thinking. Preparation means exposure to a wide and deep variety of ideas, materials, and problems in the performing arts, as well as an intense experience with both the dangers and leadership of the arts in society. Interactive participation means that all students learn to: read, write, listen to, and perform music; create and perform original dance in many styles; develop, experiment with, and present drama in many forms; and that they themselves are enabled to integrate these performing arts elements with other school subjects and with their lives outside of school. Broad literacy means [the understanding of world] cultural continuity

including listening as well as writing or creating. And finally, critical thinking means true evaluation and conclusion.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

My program was proposed as a six-year experiment [to determine whether] a working composer and a multimedia artist bring an artistic understanding to children across the elementary grades. . . . Arts programs in the United States have at their best produced little more than performing monkeys; the arts are actually about thinking and creating as well as mere replications. This program was initiated to achieve that.

The performing arts program serves the entire population of 80 students from grades K-6, offering classroom music and other performing arts, elective group instrument lessons (flute, violin, clarinet, trumpet, trombone, percussion), and elective chorus, band, drama and dance. One and one-half days are provided for the program. Group lessons and band are offered to the intermediate unit only; for the primary unit, dance and drama are provided during general music and integrated with other classroom subjects.

SAMPLE CLASS ACTIVITIES

[In my classes,] I propose simple tasks like: Please write "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" in the key of F. Sketch a dozen-word analysis of its structure. Propose four dance moves that express the music. Name a least one composer who has written a piece using this theme. Sing the song in good intonation. These are typical problems that last for fifteen minutes during one of my intermediate elementary classes. It might bloom into a dozen sub-discussions, e.g., how to figure the rhythm, how to figure out a fifth leap, why you need a b-flat if you start on F, how keys work, a reminder of how to draw treble clefs or flats, how to make up structural abbreviations. . . .

As part of a folk music exploration, we constructed several instruments, including wood flutes, miniature kotos, shakers, Celtic harps, and dulcimers. All but the dulcimers were entirely handmade. Sufficient parts were purchased to construct twelve complete, playable three-string instruments. Over the course of three classes, the students made their way through rather sketchy instructions, and then measured, cut, glued, screwed, hammered, decorated, sealed, strung, tuned and – amazingly – learned to play their dulcimers. During the entire process, the art teacher and I collaborated as "consultants."

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT/ASSESSMENT

With a nontraditional program, standard assessment techniques may or may not be revealing. The techniques selected put a great burden on the teacher to attend to each student as a human being with full and unconditional respect, and a large measure of love. With that unscientific preface, then, assessment for this program includes class participation and questioning, as well as intense dialectic (even at the first grade level) used to assess attention to the activities and comprehension of both basic materials and concepts, frequent creative written and hand work, frequent recorded individual and group work, occasional descriptive written work and major group projects, yearly individual and group

performances, occasional "scholars bowl" style competitions, and infrequent, corrected but ungraded, quizzes on technical matters.

In-class participation has increased from the very beginning of the program, so that the reluctance to risk, to criticize, to guess, to explain, and to question has almost entirely disappeared since 1985. Recorded work has been exceptional; particularly audio documents [which] are often of high school and college quality. Descriptive written work has improved. Essays begin to show the same understanding that class discussions reveal, and the grasp of how to express insight is delightful. Electives have been astonishing. Nearly every student in the intermediate unit plays a musical instrument and participates in band. Chorus, dance, and drama have enrolled the remainder, so that in the past three years, no student has not at some point been a participant in the performing arts electives.

SUMMARY

My successes have been in establishing trust, encouraging intuition, developing respect for artistic newness and differences, preparing for future arts experiences, creating confident participation, offering a sense of cultural and multicultural elements, and providing a basis for critical thinking.

The overall philosophy of the program has been met, and I believe the artistic awareness and judgment of the students has been raised. At great risk, the program encourages students to question. [It] respects their dislikes and disagreements. I believe that the working artist (and working professionals in all fields) can contribute enormously, perhaps even uniquely, to the education of elementary school children.

KAREN H. EATON

Teacher, Grade 4
Geneseo Central School
Geneseo, New York
(716) 243-4248

Nominator: E. Sue Tay
Principal

Superintendent: Jerome J. Ochs

School enrollment: K-6, 590

District enrollment: K-12, 1052

Karen Eaton has been a teacher in the New York Geneseo Central School District for over seventeen years and Elementary Department Chair, grades 4-6, for over thirteen years. Much of her experience has been in the area of curriculum development. She has her Master's degree in education with a concentration on nursery-grade 6 teaching. Ms. Eaton has served on and chaired numerous curriculum committees and has been involved in piloting and implementing new district programs. Ms. Eaton is also the owner and director of the Geneseo Developmental Day Care & Nursery School.

Ms. Eaton has taught students with a range of ability levels and with varying emotional and social strengths and weaknesses. While working with all of these diverse groups, she came to realize one important truth: "With fair, consistent standards set, and reasonable expectations maintained, success is inevitable. Every student works best with positive reinforcement and incentives."

PHILOSOPHY

Classroom management and control begin with a positive atmosphere for learning. A classroom should be a creative, motivating place that the student can take pride in. When a child is in a positive, nurturing environment he or she will be willing to take risks. I continually promote a "family atmosphere," where we all are very supportive of each other. I have worked with many groups that have consisted of high numbers of "special need" students who have met with success.

My classroom is based upon a positive environment with the assurance that each child will meet with success. Many different strategies must be used based upon the learner's ability. All children can learn and meet success when reasonable expectations are set. A fair, consistent manner must be maintained to meet both educational and behavioral standards.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

My fourth grade is a self-contained class of nineteen students. Although I have students with special needs (educational, social, and emotional), I also have students with above-average abilities. As my students have a wide range of abilities, I structure academic materials so that all of the students are able to work on the same assignment with modifications. I have implemented a daily/monthly incentive rewards program that the children work toward as a goal. The program encompasses academic assignments, as well as behavioral expectations.

For example, I use literature trade books for my reading program. The books range from the 2.0 through the 7.0 reading level. I write packets to accompany each book. I list all the skills to be taught from the New York State Syllabus and our fourth grade basals. I make sure that all of my literature packets include these skills at least once during the year and that many skills are used frequently. The packets are comprised of all aspects of analyzing literature, comprehension skills, dictionary and grammar skills, current events, social issues, as well as creativity in drama and art through plays, projects, and a multitude of activities. Integration of other subject areas such as spelling, writing, science, and social studies occurs as well.

Several books are selected to make up a theme unit. Within an assigned time frame, students work at their own pace . . . but they must complete all requirements of each book with acceptable quality. I choose several books of varying reading abilities within each unit, so that each child will be able to participate in the unit by reading on his or her level. Students of different ability levels often choose to work on assignments as partners.

SAMPLE CLASS ACTIVITY

At times, I let the children who are below-level in reading select a book they want to read regardless of their reading ability. I then pair a better reader, who has selected the same book, together with the first reader. They read the book together, and do the required assignments/project as partners. It is wonderful to watch this interaction . . . a very positive, helpful camaraderie being fostered between the two classmates. They both feel a great deal of pride and success following this experience.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT/ASSESSMENT

When the students start the year as typical fourth graders they [are far from enthusiastic] when they are asked to do written assignments. A parent's recent comment made me again realize the reason why I chose teaching as a profession. She said, "[In the past] my son would not pick up a pencil . . . how did you do it?" This student is by far one of the best writers I have seen at this stage of fourth grade. He is writing lengthy, high-quality stories, and is proud of his publishing. He took risks in a positive, nurturing environment. He had the support of his classmates, with positive feedback. He had firm, yet fair, consistent standards, and knew what was expected of him. We have worked on self-esteem and self-concept skills. The students feel good about themselves, exhibiting self-confidence and

enthusiasm. Colleagues [who know these students] are amazed at the marked change in their attitudes and behaviors.

SUMMARY

Communications, as well as planning and organizational skills, are essential "musts" for a teacher to possess. Classroom management and control begin with a positive atmosphere for learning. A classroom should be a creative, nurturing place that the students can take pride in. When a child is in a positive, nurturing environment, s/he will be willing to take risks. I continually promote a "family atmosphere," where we all are very supportive of each other.

The program has been very successful, the students love it, and I am seeing the results that I expect from the students in my class. I serve as the [learning] facilitator . . . a role that keeps me extremely busy! I never hear the familiar phrase: "I'm bored" or "I don't have anything to do!" The students love the literature books and how the activities interrelate to the readings. The skills have become more meaningful. With the proper elements in place, success can be any child's dream.

BARBARA HOLLAND-MOODY

Teacher, Early Childhood Resource Center
Project GROW
Sippican School
16 Spring Street
Marion, Massachusetts 02738
(508) 748-0100

Nominator: Jane Taylor
Early Childhood Coordinator

Superintendent: Joan M. Walsh
Old Rochester RSD
Mattapoisett, MA 02739

School enrollment: K-6, 411

District enrollment: K-12, 2257

Barbara Holland-Moody has taught for over fourteen years in day care centers, after-school programs, the Massachusetts Migrant Education Program, and in public schools. The majority of her experience has been with children aged three to six years. She is currently enrolled in graduate courses at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, working toward a Teacher of Young Children with Special Needs certificate. Ms. Holland-Moody is a member of NAEYC, the Whole Language Teachers Association of New England and Southeastern Massachusetts. She has served on numerous committees for her school district such as the Early Childhood Advisory Council and the Philosophy and Implementation of Developmentally Appropriate Practices N-6 committee. She is also a member of the steering committee for the Lesley College Kindergarten Conference.

The integrated preschool at the Sippican School began its first class in February, 1988. Ms. Holland-Moody was the original teacher hired to instruct this class. The program has developed through team efforts as one able to successfully accommodate a diverse population of children. A parent's high praise of Project GROW led to its receiving the "1990 School Mainstreaming Commendation" publicized in the October 1990 issue of Exceptional Parent Magazine. This in turn led to a feature article in the November/December issue of the magazine. A video, "Preschool Integration," made by the class was selected at a special needs conference as "an outstanding example of integration."

PHILOSOPHY

I believe that early childhood education is the foundation for further learning. The foundation begins in the home, with parents being the first teachers. I, as a teacher, build on these beginnings. Education should seek to encourage listening skills, a sense of self-reliance, responsibility, positive self-esteem, caring, and respect for others. Independence and love of learning should be the ultimate goals. To reach these goals, attention should be given to individual needs and styles of learning. The learning must be appropriate to the developmental age of the child. The learning process should take place with a hands-on, self-initiated approach.

The rationale behind the model of integration is that the program will provide an opportunity for all students to learn from each other. The students [learn to] identify and appreciate individual differences. They become sensitive to the needs of others. Their self-esteem flourishes as [they have the opportunity] to see themselves as teachers. [In addition], as special needs students are challenged by their peers, in this multiage, multi-ability setting, they learn age-appropriate skills. . . social, cognitive, motor, and language. Through these challenges, the children become more independent and develop higher level skills.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The integrated early childhood classroom, Project GROW [serving children three to five years old], provides up to seven special needs preschoolers with the least restrictive, most challenging educational opportunity while addressing the needs of at least eight other community children unable to access a preschool program. The classroom is staffed by a full-time early childhood teacher and a twenty-five-hour-a-week classroom aide. Appropriate therapists are provided by the Special Needs Director according to the needs of individual children. Children attend school from 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday. Staff spend the balance of the school day and Fridays consulting, planning, making home visits, attending meetings and conferences, attending screenings, and visiting other programs.

The curriculum model used in the integrated preschool is the High/Scope Model, a program that helps children to become self-reliant problem-solvers. Within a carefully planned daily routine divided between teacher-initiated and child-initiated routines, children are given opportunities to solve problems independently. A key component of the model is "plan, do, and review." During planning time, small groups of children meet to decide what they would like to do within the various centers of the classroom, i.e., blocks, PlayDough, water table, writing area, computer, dramatic play, games, etc. Modifications are made to allow all of the children to "make a plan." At work time the children "do" their plans, supported by the staff. Adults help extend the children's ideas by working alongside them, role-playing, or assisting in problem-solving strategies. Recall time is an opportunity for the children to describe or act out what they have done, and to assess their own progress plan for tomorrow.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT/ASSESSMENT

The [most] positive impact is in the strong parent component. Parents' positive feelings about the program as a whole and the effects on their individual child is evident in their support. The parents volunteer, raise funds, donate necessary supplies, and drive on our numerous field trips.

The therapists appreciate the on-going effects provided in the classroom to meet individual needs. Parents of former students frequently call or stop by to discuss their children's continuing successes. The Department of Education refers school districts to our program as a model of integrated and developmentally appropriate practices. Frequent visitors spend time in the classroom.

SAMPLE CLASS ACTIVITIES

Math: We graph how many and which kind of fruit the students brought for our fruit salad that we'll make at small group time. Pre-cut paper fruit [is available] to put on graph. After everyone has a turn, rows will be counted and tabulated. Modifications will be made for all to participate.

Reading: The Very Hungry Caterpillar, by Eric Carle. Children are encouraged to predict, count, and "read" the dialogue about food. We sing the "Junk Food Song."

Recall: Children are to bring one item they played with to the recall table. The rest of the group attempts to decide which area the child played in, using verbal clues, sign language, or other gestures to provide hints.

SUMMARY

Through the challenges, the children become more independent and develop higher level skills. They increase their self-concept. The benefits for teachers and parents are that opportunities are available to help children develop to their fullest potential. The community as a whole benefits because stereotypes can be eliminated. Children learn at an early age to interact and accept each others' unique differences. Integration prepares us all for the real world.

My motivation for implementing the program is quite simply that it works. It is exciting and rewarding to observe breakthroughs on a day-to-day basis.

ELLEN A. THOMPSON

Teacher, Grades 1-3
Union Memorial School
P.O. Box 160, Main Street
Colchester, Vermont 05446-0160
(802) 878-2117

Nominator: Bradley Blanchette
High School Teacher

Superintendent: Roger Bourassa

School enrollment: K-3, 330

District enrollment: K-8, 892

Ellen Thompson is President of the Vermont State Council on Reading. She is a teacher of a grade 1-3 multiage class at Union Memorial School in Colchester, Vermont. Ms. Thompson has been a teacher for over fourteen years. She completed her Masters of Education degree at the University of Vermont, defending the use of a whole language philosophy for her oral examination. She was declared the runner-up for Vermont State Teacher of the Year in 1986.

In 1987 Ms. Thompson designed and taught a course for the University of Vermont entitled "Reading and Writing in the Whole Language Curriculum" and has been teaching this course ever since. She also teaches similar courses for the American Institute for Creative Education, which offers graduate level courses throughout the Northeast. Her duties as 1990-91 President of the Vermont State Council on Reading include setting up state-wide conferences for the school year. Through courses and conference presentations and planning, Ms. Thompson has had the opportunity to share with hundreds of teachers around the region, grades K-12.

Ms. Thompson was awarded the state award for the 1990-91 "Leaders of Readers" competition sponsored by Family Circle Magazine and the International Reading Association. The award money of $1000 was used to bring two Vermont children's author/illustrators to Union Memorial School during their week long "Celebration of Young Authors and Illustrators."

PHILOSOPHY

I view myself as a facilitator of learning for my students. I feel it is my responsibility to provide my students with the most literate environment possible by providing time, choice, responsibility, community, and empowerment, for both child and teacher, as learner and facilitator of knowledge producing activities. I strive to provide valid, real-life learning experiences.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

My classroom is a multiage classroom with 24 children in grades 1- 3. Ages range from 5 years old to 10 years old. Children range in abilities in all grade levels. My classroom program defies categorization. If I had to name it, I would say it is a classroom which encourages "whole learning" for each individual child within the larger community of learners . . . where children are encouraged to take control of their learning and especially their learning environment . . . the children in my classroom are decision makers. Ability grouping of students is never done. Children are taught whole group, individually, and through small specific skill groups.

For the past six years I have made no use of text books, workbooks, or dittos. I have worked on developing an understanding of the whole language teaching philosophy which helps both the children and teachers put "learning" into the primary focal point versus the old theory which puts "teaching" into that position. It became apparent to me that my whole language style of instruction didn't stop and start throughout the day. It continued on through multiage group activities, science, social studies, and even mathematics. The subject areas became less defined and isolated. Our day began to flow with interdisciplinary teaching themes. At first several in any given year – finally blossoming to the advent of a whole year interdisciplinary theme study.

All subject areas in our school district's curriculum areas are addressed through the use of a whole year theme study. Each year is all new, with themes not being repeated from year to year. Themes are selected which are of high interest to myself as well as the students. It is important that we are all learners in this type of process teaching. Themes are led in direction by the literature used and the interests of the classroom community. Ideas for hands-on, active learning experiences are used liberally. The children become part of the theme through their writing, reading, speaking, and listening. And, in this same manner, all other academic areas are experienced.

SAMPLE CLASS ACTIVITY

"Village Memories" was the year-long interdisciplinary study theme used with 24 students from the village area of Colchester. The group explored the history of this section of town through the use of a variety of small themes which all fed into the "overarching" theme of "Village Memories." Of particular importance to these children was the fact that 1991 was the bicentennial year for the state of Vermont.

A number of supporting theme studies were involved. They used fairy tales as reading material to study type and focus, [as well as] discussion of new tales, and then rewrote fairy tales individually and as a class – Vermont style! They discussed Mother Goose rhymes, with a look at "new" Mother Goose by Jack Prelusky in Ride a Purple Pelican. An introduction to maps was begun, as the location of his rhymes were recorded on the wall map. Family history and awareness was a large part of theme work in the fall. Children found their homes on the maps and created personal time lines showing their course in history. There were Authors' Teas where children invited guests and read aloud from their favorite school-published book. Process math instruction was used with children working with manipulative math projects, including problem solving strategies. All of these activities, and many more, led up to a culminating experience of the study, a three day

camp out at a local state park. All family members were invited to attend. This was a community event.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT/ASSESSMENT

Indicators [that illustrate] that multiage whole year thematic teaching is the right course of instruction for me and the children I teach include: behavior problems are at a minimum; children choose to read, write and do math at "free choice time"; children read and write at home; parents are involved and anxious to be part of the classroom environment; the children take their "Author's Tea" very seriously, practicing and rehearsing diligently for this event; actual work products show evidence of learning and pride in their work; and the children themselves are their own best form of evaluation. [My students] are confident, informed, excited, and challenged readers, writers, and mathematicians.

The specific means for academic evaluation this year has been the use of student generated academic portfolios. I make use of Informal Reading Inventories to monitor growth in reading. The use of reading inventories at the beginning of the year helps me to custom tailor instruction to the children. The use of academic journals allows me an opportunity to read and understand just what the children are learning in content areas, as well as allowing me a chance to monitor their growth in independent writing skills. Children respond in journals to self-selected books read, science experiments, teacher-read books, and special events. Finally, kid watching and talking is the best way to evaluate this kind of program. By listening in and observing, it is obvious that this type of program really impacts on their lives; not just school lives, but their whole life. I know, because it is the same for me!

SUMMARY

The emphasis in my classroom is on the process involved in the undertakings. Often our published products are exciting and beautiful, but it is still the process that went into these products that really tells the story. Listening to my children explain their efforts to others is proof of the importance of this process-centered learning. This style of teaching is rejuvenating for all involved, from the teacher, to the students, to the parents. Everyone is involved and active in the learning.

1991-1992 Teacher Recognition Program Finalists

Below we list this year's Finalists whose quality work and programs also deserve recognition and use. We invite you to contact these teachers, as well as those profiled in the previous pages, to discuss their outstanding classroom programs.

Doreen Avallone
Grade 2 Teacher

Holland Elementary School
Sturbridge Road
RFD 2 Box 109
Holland, MA 01521
(508) 245-9664

One program that Doreen Avallone runs in her classroom is a heterogeneously grouped math program that uses the techniques of cooperative learning as the basic teaching and learning strategy. Students are mixed together in teams. Math manipulatives and the reduction of drill worksheets are the cornerstone of this program. In this classroom, math concepts are something that teachers and students discover together.

Mary Lou Connors
Integrated Preschool Teacher

Special Education Office
N. Andover Public Schools
675 Chickering Road
North Andover, MA 01845
(508) 794-1717

Mary Lou Connors is responsible for the development of North Andover's Integrated Preschool Program, which serves three and four year old children with special needs along with their peers who do not have disabilities. The program operates four days a week and serves a total of twenty-six children. Ms. Connor's philosophy can be summed up in two words, "Everyone Belongs!" She is an effective and skilled educator who works cooperatively with parents, children, colleagues, administrators, and the community.

Adele K. LaGrou
Grade 1 Teacher

Geneseo Central School
Geneseo, NY 14454
(716) 243-4248

Although Adele LaGrou does not use any one program in her classroom, she believes the educational experiences that she provides her students are all, to some extent, based upon the whole language philosophy of learning – students and the learning considered as whole entities. She provides learning experiences for a wide range of ability levels and interests that are organized around themes. Language arts, science, and social studies concepts and skills are incorporated within each theme.

Improving education is a challenging task but not an impossible one. It requires the energy, commitment, and cooperation of many people who share a vision and a plan to make change happen. The Regional Laboratory provides a link between people and between research and practice.

One of our roles is providing clients with information about research knowledge, proven practices, and new policy initiatives. Resources like the **Outstanding Teaching Practices Series** can help enrich the quality of education in the Northeast United States and its Caribbean jurisdictions by sharing information about outstanding teaching practices and those who implement them.

For us the classroom is at the heart of educational improvement: our goal is better student learning. To reach that goal we collaborate with others throughout the region as they reshape education to focus on and support enhanced learning for all students.

The Regional Laboratory is one of ten regional educational laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Our region encompasses the six New England States, New York, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

For information about The Regional Laboratory, our products, or services, write or call

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